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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000577

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PTER](#) [OVIP](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [YM](#) [DEMARCHE](#)

SUBJECT: YEMEN: SYRIA OUT OF LEBANON, IN DUE TIME

REF: A. SECSTATE 39018

[1](#)B. SANAA 477

[1](#)C. SANAA 564

Classified By: DCM Nabeel Khoury for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador delivered ref A demarche to Foreign Minister Qirbi on March 11. Ambassador conveyed the U.S. demand for full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559, calling for a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, including the Syrian Military Intelligence (SMI) presence. Other issues discussed were next steps in SALW, the security situation in HOA, and the FM's interest in visiting Washington this spring. End Summary.

FM Urges Caution With Syria

[1](#)2. (C) Yemen agrees with the U.S. position on Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, Qirbi told Ambassador, pointing out that President Saleh made this clear to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his recent phone call (ref B). At the same time, Qirbi expressed concern over recent pro-Syrian demonstrations by Hizbollah, claiming that they represent the views of a large portion of the Lebanese people and should not be dismissed. Qirbi warned that the situation is very delicate and urged all sides to be responsible. Qirbi said the Lebanon crisis will be discussed in detail at the March 22-23 Arab Summit in Algiers.

[1](#)3. (C) The FM noted the recent withdrawal of Syrian troops to the Biqa' as a positive step, one that the international community should encourage. Qirbi said Assad wants the U.S. to understand that he is "not Saddam," and suggested that the U.S. capitalize on Syria's positive gestures. The U.S. should make a clear statement in support of elections, stability, and the democratic process in Lebanon, advised Qirbi, but added that the world has lived with this problem for 22 years and it may take longer than two months to resolve. Ambassador agreed that Syria's withdrawal to Biqa' was a positive move, but emphasized that in the U.S. view, it is far from sufficient. What is needed from Syria, said Ambassador, is full compliance with 1559, including removal of SMI offices. Washington's will on this issue is strong, he told the FM, Syria needs to take urgent action.

Roadmap for Lebanon... Leads to Damascus

[1](#)4. (C) The FM recommended the U.S. take Syria's concerns over Israel into account and suggested that all sides develop a roadmap to resolve the crisis in Lebanon. Ambassador responded that our roadmap for resolving the current crisis in Lebanon is UNSCR 1559, and that Israel is not a factor at this time. DCM added that it would be foolish for Syria to use Hizbollah demonstrations to prove that the Lebanese people want Syrian forces to remain; this would only serve to polarize the country. They have played this game for two long, and the game is up, said DCM, this message should be delivered clearly to Syria from all Arab countries.

[1](#)5. (C) Qirbi agreed with the U.S. view on open Lebanese elections, and said Yemen backs Prime Minister Omar Karami's current efforts to form a new consensus government. There must be national unity regarding election results, said Qirbi. He added that Syrian troop presence could cause the situation to explode in the absence of an accord for the future, and supported a partial Syrian withdrawal before the elections.

Small Arms, New Line at MFA

[1](#)6. (S) Ambassador summarized his meeting with President Saleh on controlling the flow of SALW to Yemen (ref C). Reiterating U.S. concerns over end-user certificates and the diversion of weapons to non-military sources, he highlighted Saleh's pledge to end the use of private arms dealers. Ambassador noted a standing U.S. offer to help with procurement and inventory systems to better document ROYG arms purchases.

[1](#)7. (S) Qirbi insisted that Saleh's promise was nothing new,

and that the ROYG has already been following this policy for over a year. He did confirm, however, that "from now on" the ROYG will deal directly with arms producing countries, and not employ private brokers. Shifting his tone, Qirbi blamed supplier nations for selling weapons to "unlicensed" Yemenis. It is their responsibility, he said, to check with Yemeni embassies and verify dealers are legitimate. Ambassador agreed and said the U.S. would convey this message to the EU, NATO, and China.

18. (S) The FM predicted that restricting sales would increase SALW prices and likely encourage smuggling. Echoing Saleh's statement on March 10, Qirbi said that in his view the only long-term solution to the spread of SALW is for the U.S. and the GCC countries to buy out the souks (ref C).

Risk of Renewed Conflict in HOA

19. (C) Having just returned from an official visit to Asmara, Qirbi said bilateral relations between Yemen and Eritrea were on the right track. He remained considerably more pessimistic about the future of relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Qirbi reported that the ROE was critical of the African Union, the UN, and the U.S. for not taking a harder line on Ethiopian withdrawal, and that both sides were holding firmly to their positions.

Qirbi Goes To Washington?

110. (SBU) Qirbi told Ambassador he would like to meet with Secretary Rice and suggested a possible May or June official

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visit to Washington. Ambassador promised to arrange the visit. Qirbi offered high praise the Secretary, saying she was "doing a good job at improving the image of U.S. policies and clearly had the President behind her."

Comment

11. (C) Comment: The ROYG has placed itself with the international community in calling for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, as indicated by Saleh's unusual call to President Assad (made public the next day in the official press). The ROYG position on full compliance with 1559 remains fuzzy. Qirbi indicated support for a withdrawal in advance of Lebanese elections. The FM dropped the hint, however, that Hizbollah demonstrations raise the specter of civil strife -- something which may indicate that the ROYG believes in the need for "some" Syrian presence to remain in the country. Krajewski